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GUATEMALA. PRESIDENTE, 1873-1885

Message in which the constitutional president of the republic, Gen'l J. Rufino Barrios, renders an account of the settlemint of the Mexican boundary question.
1883

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MESSAGE

IN WHICH THE

CONSTITUTIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,

Gen'l J. Rufino Barrios,

RENDERS AN ACCOUNT TO THE

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Settlement of the Mexican Boundary Question.

NEW YORK:
Press of "Las Novedades,"
23 LIBERTY STREET.
1883.

GENTLEMEN OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:

On the 24th of April last I had the honor of addressing the Representatives of the Nation, pointing out the very grave evils that were being brought upon the country by the indefiniteness of the boundaries of its territory with that of the United States of Mexico, and in order to solve this inveterate question which had so greatly occupied the attention and so seriously compromised the position of the Republic, I resolved to leave no means untried. While doing so I practically and conscientously consulted the interests of our country, feeling pursuaded that by so doing I should render it a most inestimable service, and I requested, in the event of its being thought expedient, that very ample and especial authority, conferred by decree, should be given to me, to put an end to the dispute, in the manner I should deem most conducive to the welfare of the Republic. I asked for this authority, in view of the importance of the steps to be taken, and for this reason I did not wish to proceed in the matter without the full knowledge and consent of the Assembly, and only by virtue of the ordinary powers conferred on the Executive by the Constitution; and you, Gentlemen, considered well founded the arrangements set forth in the message I addressed to you for the purpose and on the 28th of the same month issued the decree conferring on me such unlimited authority. Under provision of this decree, and availing myself, so as to be able to absent myself from the Territory of Central America, of the leave of absence granted to me for one year, in order to rest from the fatigues of the Presidency, I started from this Capital for the United States of America at the end of June, and having returned early in November last, after settling the dispute, I now, in compliance with my promise, come to render you account of the negotiation concluded, and for this reason you have been convoked to an extraordinary session.

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Official communications from the Ministers of Guatemala accredited to the United States of America and to Mexico, convinced me that grave complications would arise if the boundary question were treated and became the subject of negotiations in two places simultaneously, by two different persons and on two distinct bases, apt to engender grave complications, and in order to remove any such, and arrive at a satisfactory solution, it seemed to me indispensable that there should be joint action, by dealing myself direct with the matter, while listening at the same time to both representatives of the Government. I considered my personal intervention unavoidable, and the result has clearly proved that I was not mistaken. I proceeded to the United States, and at once became aware that the dispute had run, and was running a serious risk of drifting into a real conflict; that I had arrived at a critical moment, and that but for my timely arrival, it would have been impossible later on, to stem the torrent of difficulties and calamities in which the country would have been involved. Whatever the incidents of my trip may have been, I am glad that I left at the right moment, and without wishing to boast, I feel convinced that, without my presence nothing would have been done, and that we should now have to confront a chaos of discord and confusion.

The reports from the Minister of Guatemala at Washington stated that he had held conferences in that capital with the Plenipotentiary from Mexico; that they had already agreed to a project for submitting the dispute to arbitration; that in accordance with this project the Government of the United States was to act as umpire; that the said Government accepted such mediation, and all idea of a treaty in Mexico had to be abandoned. The despatches from Dr. Manuel Herrera, representative from this republic, to the United States of Mexico, stated that the treaty proposed by him relinquishing the possession of Chiapas and Soconusco in consideration of an indemnity would be accepted by Mexico; that this was the course that ought to be adopted; that the matter should be brought to a conclusion in that place, and that arbitration was impossible. Things could not continue in this condition any longer, and therefore on leaving for the Capital of the United States of America, I telegraphed instructions to our Representative in

Mexico, to meet me there, so that we might discuss the matter and bring it to a termination.

In order to expedite matters, I held a conference as soon as possible with the Secretary of State of the American Government, declaring to him that the Government of Guatemala was anxious to put an end to the pending boundary question with Mexico; that in order to terminate the same, this Republic relinquished its rights to the ownership of Chiapas and Soconusco, the only point that so far had stood in the way of an arrangement; and that on this basis Guatemala desired the arbitration of the President of the United States. As the Minister of this Republic had given assurance that the arbitration had already been proposed by him, and by the Representative of Mexico, and accepted by the Government of the United States, I was certainly somewhat surprised to ascertain that on behalf of Mexico no such proposition had been made, nor had the project been agreed to; that consequently all had to be commenced over again, in as much as it was indispensable that Mexico should equally express a wish of arbitration, so that the President of the U. S. might take upon himself a responsibility, which he was good enough to declare in deference to both countries he would not decline, provided that both parties near to the dispute gave him authority to that effect. As what I heard was not in accord with the information furnished to me by our representative, I persistently dwelt on the idea that all Guatemala wanted was that the Government of the United States should decide the dispute as arbitrator, and that such was my proposition, liable to being either accepted or declined by Mexico, but that in either case I should have fulfilled my duty by granting as much as I possibly could. As it was decided in this conference that the nature of the business called for written statements, the offer was made that a note should be sent in the following day embodying the ideas of the Government of Guatemala.

This note was written and signed by the Minister of Guatemala on the 21st of July; in it was set forth the desire of this Republic to bring to a termination the dispute respecting the boundaries with Mexico, and for this purpose in futherance of peace and friendship between the two countries, the

claim to Chiapas and Soconusco, the only obstacle that had hitherto stood in the way was waived; that on this basis the Government of Guatemala desired that the President of the United States as arbitrator, and with such preliminary formalities as he might think fit to prescribe, should fix the line of division between the two countries, and that through the Minister of Guatemala in Mexico the proposition of Guatemala should be made known to that Government, a proposition which, if acceded to, would put an end to the dispute, and if declined would serve as evidence to all the world that we, on our side, had spared no means of conciliation, and had made every possible concession.

Later on, after returning to Mr. Matias Romero the Plenipotentiary of Mexico, a visit he had paid me, I spoke to him about the business in hand, and he expressed to me the most favorable disposition to settle it on the terms I had suggested. He at the same time declared however, that he was, so far, without authority from his Government to treat; that the bases which had been under consideration on the 17th of April, and which already stipulated the abandonment of Chiapas, had been presented by him in a private capacity, and delivered confidentially to the Minister of Guatemala without instructions, and not in any official manner, and he therefore would have to ask for instructions and powers from his Government which he would do by telegraph. On the 24th of July the Secretary of State at Washington on his part, answered the note that had been addressed to him, signed by the Plenipotentiary of Guatemala in the United States, stating in his reply that it would afford the President great pleasure to accept the distinguished mark of confidence reposed in him, whenever Guatemala and Mexico, agreeing upon bases, should jointly solicit his intervention as umpire, to decide the dispute concerning the boundaries, a dispute which in his opinion, the claim to Chiapas and Soconusco being disposed of, and reduced to the establishment of boundaries, evidently led to a peaceful and harmonious solution.

It would be useless to go into the details of the conduct observed a short time afterwards, by the diplomatic representative of Guatemala in Washington, and the attention of the As-

sembly to such miserable trifles; the country knows me, and already has judged and characterized his conduct; and were I to seek to justify myself, it would seem as though I thought my own could be suspected. I must however, before stating to you the conditions of the negotiation concluded about the important question of frontiers, make it publicly known on this solemn occasion, that I received constantly at the hands of both the the government and the people of the United States every proof of esteem and consideration, the memory of which I preserve with affectionate gratitude, in token of the sympathy and respect I feel for that generous and noble nation.

Mr. Romero, the Plenipotentiary of Mexico in the United States of America, received from his Government the necessary powers for the discussion and signing of the convention respecting the boundaries with this Republic, on the basis of considering Chiapas and Soconusco as an integral part of the Mexican Confederation. Meanwhile Mr. Herrera, Minister of Guatemala to Mexico, arrived in New York; so that, after several prolonged conferences the substantial bases of the arrangement for putting an end to the dispute were agreed upon, and signed in that city on the 12th of August. Therein it is declared that the Governments of Guatemala and Mexico are desirous of bringing to an amicable termination the difficulties that existed between the two Republics, and that it is their earnest wish to lay down solid foundations for the relations that should bind them to one another, and keeping these precedents in view, the preliminary articles for a definitive boundary treaty on that part of the frontier comprised by the State of Chiapas, were drawn up.

These articles read as follows:

I.—The Republic of Guatemala withdraws from the discussion it has maintained relative to the rights it possesses to the territory of the State of Chiapas and its department of Soconusco.

II.—The definitive treaty of boundaries between Guatemala and Mexico, is to be made on the basis of considering Chiapas and Soconusco integral parts of the United States of Mexico.

III.—The Republic of Guatemala, satisfied with the due appreciation that Mexico entertains of its conduct, and with the acknowledgment that the exalted motives which inspired the agreement set forth in the preceding articles are worthy and honorable, will not exact a pecuniary indemnity, nor any other compensation on account of the foregoing stipulations.

IV.—In case the two contracting parties should not be able to agree, as to the partial or total demarcation of boundaries, between the State of Chiapas and its department of Soconusco on the part of Mexico, and the Republic of Guatemala on the other part, or the commissioners that each must name to determine jointly the demarcation of the dividing line, should differ on one or more points concerning said demarcation, and it should become necessary to nominate a third party to adjust the difficulties that might arise on this head, both Governments agree to do so, and also to request the President of the United States of America to act as third party or umpire.

V.—In the demarcation of the dividing line, actual possession shall serve as the basis of the general rule; but this shall not prevent such basis being departed from, by both parties, conjointly, for the purpose of following natural lines, or on any other account, and in this case the system of mutual compensations shall be adopted, pending which drawing of the dividing line each contracting party shall respect the actual possession of the other.

VI.—The Governments of Guatemala and of the United States of Mexico, solemnly engage to sign the definitive treaty of boundaries, on the basis set forth in the present convention, in the City of Mexico, at the latest within six months reckoned from this date.

By virtue of these conditions Guatemala can no longer allege any right to the territory of the State of Chiapas and of its department Soconusco, which, on the boundaries being established, must be held to be an integral part of the United

States of Mexico; nor can Guatemala, by reason of this stipulation exact pecuniary indemnity or other compensation.

I present to you, Gentlemen, in all its nakedness, without any reserve, without any artifice, this point which constitutes the concession made by Guatemala, for I do not wish to conceal it nor to disguise it in any way, and because with the consciousness of my actions, I am fully persuaded that in proceeding as I did, I have in no way impaired the rights of the country, nor burdened the same with any sacrifice whatsoever, but that on the contrary I have rendered it great service by removing such a knotty and at the same time barren question; that cropping up at every step, and assuming threatening proportions, was calculated to interfere with the tranquil progress of the country.

You will excuse me, Gentlemen of the Assembly, if though only in a rapid sketch, I recall to your recollection some of the antecedents of that inveterate dispute which has rendered the territory of Chiapas and Soconusco so prominent as an apple of discord, flung between two peoples that should for so many reasons unite in and embrace of the most cordial fraternity.

Before deciding to ask the Assembly for the very ample authority I solicited, and which was granted to me, I had very seriously and thoroughly reflected on the bearings of this Chiapas and Soconusco question. Two solutions suggested themselves; either to go on in a head-strong manner and cling to the rights of Guatemala to that province, which would render impossible all arrangement, as Mexico on its side had declared a thousand times, that it would not relinquish its claim to the same, nor even submit it to arbitration, and that consequently whatever the treaty it must distinctly state as a basis that these provinces constituted part of its territory; or abandon Chiapas and Soconusco, and, giving up the dispute about it fix clear and sure boundaries between Mexico and Guatemala. The first would stumble upon the determined refusal of the United States of Mexico, the material impossibility of Guatemala conquering by force of arms that territory, and it must be said upon opinions that reckoned in their favor arguments neither few

nor contemptible. The changes of fortune through which our history has passed since 1821, are familiar to you, and you are all well aware that whenever Guatemala has most exerted itself to make good its rights to Chiapas and Soconusco, it has been met by an answer replete with facts and based on many grounds.

Mexican writers tell us, that Chiapas proclaimed its independence from Spain, and its incorporation with Mexico on the 3d of September, 1821, taking the oath thereto on the 8th of the same month, before the independence of Guatemala was proclaimed; that not only did Chiapas do this, but Guatemala, induced by the intrigues of the servile party to maintain our country annexed to an empire, a few days later, in conformity with the resolution of the Assembly of the 5th of January, 1822, did unite with Mexico; that on account of this last resolution, there took place a meeting of the authorities and people of Chiapas, in order to make it publicly known that they remained independent from the former kingdom of Guatemala, and that in accordance with their wish and oath, Chiapas formed part and parcel of the Mexican Empire, passing to that intent the act of the 29th of September, 1822, in which it was declared that it did not wish to belong to Guatemala, but to Mexico, and a Commissioner was appointed to convey this expression of opinion to the President of the latter Republic.

They dispute our claims calling to mind that, when a popular vote was taken as to whether Chiapas should belong to Mexico or Guatemala, there resulted, as is attested by the act of the 12th of September, 1824, that on examination being made, 96,829 votes were cast for Mexico, and only 60,400 for Guatemala, from which cause arose the new act of Declaration of Federation of the 14th of December, 1824.

They tell us that all the Constitutions of Mexico have included Chiapas as part of its territory; the first Federal Constitution of 1824; the one promulgated in 1843 denominated organic bases, and the article 43 of the one of 1857; that during the Central Republic, and the promulgation of the seven Constitutive laws, by which the Mexican States were converted into departments, Chiapas was one of them, nominating its Dep-

uties to the General Congress and its Senators; that in the following years, when the Legislative authority was exercised by popular assemblies, Chiapas elected its Deputies, who were its representatives in the Congress, and that when the Dictatorship held rule it was submitted thereto. They tell us that the independence from Spain being established, the provinces of the Captaincy General of Guatemala, to which jurisdiction, according to the laws of the Ondies, Chiapas and Soconusco had certainly appertained, remained independent of one another, and that whilst some could, and wished to form by themselves Sovereign Republics, others wished to, and could unite with other nationalities, as was done by Chiapas, and as was done by Guatemala itself; that the incorporation of Chiapas and Soconusco was prior to that of Guatemala and independent of it, and therefore if the latter, on account of the abdication and absence from Mexico of the Emperor Agustin Iturbide, chose and was at liberty to separate itself, Chiapas might continue irrevocably united to Mexico; and as the first co-operated in forming a new Confederacy with the other provinces of Central America, so could Chiapas form part of the Mexican Federation.

They tell us that Chiapas has always possessed its political constitution as part of Mexico, the last one being that of the 4th of January, 1858, and that on the contrary the Federation of Central America itself, by decree of 21st of July, 1823, declared that if Chiapas desired to unite with them, it would be received with the greatest pleasure, which implies the acknowledgment of the legality of separation. They call our attention to the fact that, since the year 1824 Chiapas has obeyed the laws of Mexico, and has had recourse to its tribunals; that it has always shared the destinies of that nation, participating in its misfortunes, and contributing with its money and with its soldiers to the support of the wars it has carried on; that it has at all times been subject to its rule, be it the rule of Liberty or the rule of Dictatorship, and that never, however fraught with danger the times may have been, not even in the days of anarchy, nor during the war with the United States, nor during the last war waged against the French intervention, has Chiapas endeavored to separate from Mexico, notwithstanding the fact that its position and remoteness would have facilitated with

separation, for the latter could have been affected with greater ease and less risk and liability than that of any of the remaining States; and that recently in the very days when the boundary question was being discussed on all sides, and by the press with the greatest warmth, Chiapas had made the most energetic protests against the idea of belonging to Guatemala, and had put forth the most explicit and decided declarations of its wish to continue forming part of the Mexican Republic. They bring to our notice that the utmost that can be pretended is, that Chiapas had been one of the States of the Federation of Central America; but that Guatemala alone and for itself could not lay claim to that right, whilst the Federation lasted from 1823, because it possessed no sovereignty nor international representation; and that, although the alliance was dissolved in April, 1839, and the dissolution was confirmed by the decree of 1847, in which Guatemala declared itself a Sovereign Republic, the rights held by the Federation were not transmitted to it. They answer us that there are no conclusive proofs that the Junta of Chiapas did not act of its own free will; that Mexico was not to blame because Guatemala did not send in proper time the Commissioner who on its behalf was to have been present at the voting; and that whatever compulsion, whatever pressure might have been brought to bear, their influence would have been evanescent, ceasing as soon as they disappeared; whilst Chiapas, constantly and under every circumstance, has persevered in its determination of not forming a part of Guatemala, but of Mexico.

As regards Soconusco in particular, they point out to us that it has always been a district or department of Chiapas; that when the latter separated from Guatamala and united with Mexico on the 3rd of September, 1821, Soconusco had to follow the destinies of Chiapas, for it was in accordance with the constitutive legislation of the Indies, one of its "Intendencias," and was thus tied up with it; and that if, on the meeting of the Assembly, in 1824, it voted in favor of belonging to Guatemala, it had, nevertheless, to accept and obey the resolution of the majority, which was in favor of Mexico; that the decree of the Federal Congress of the United States of Central America of the 18th of August, 1824, cannot be appealed to, for it only re-

mained as a document, because Soconusco had the intention of entering into the Federation as a State, and not of becoming a department of Guatemala; and that it would have regained its independence on the dissolution of the Federation; and that against this declaration, which had no force of obligation for Mexico, Chiapas protested in September, 1824, and the Federal Government made a reclamation in March, 1825. To the preliminaries of that year, and the occupation by General Santa Anna in 1842, they urge in opposition that the Government of Central America had sent troops in January, 1825, to take military possession of the town of Tapachula; that the possession of Soconusco could not remain for an indefinite period in the anomalous position in which it had been left by the preliminaries, merely under municipal rule, unless it were that there was a prospect of arriving at a speedy arrangement, which was counted upon at the time of agreeing to the preliminaries, for Soconusco would only have served as a refuge for malefactors, being so to say out of the pale of political authority; and lastly, supposing even that there had been some irregularity in the records of the Junta of Chiapas, or in the occupation of Soconusco, all this would have been remedied, not only as being acts committed long ago, but also by ratification founded on the acquiescence of Chiapas, which during a period of 61 years has not protested, and of Soconusco, which also has abstained from doing so during a period of 40 years.

Whoever reflects coolly and dispassionately on this matter must come to the conclusion that, with all the antecedents stated, and considered in all their aspects, it was not so easy as any political visionary might suppose to make the rights of Guatemala triumph in a well reasoned and calm discussion, and prove that Chiapas and Soconusco ought to form part of its territory and be restored to it. And not only was the right not irrefutable and clear, but it was also impossible to think of conquering those provinces and wrenching them from Mexico by force of arms. Had our right been unimpeachable and clear, had Chiapas and Soconusco lifted their voices against Mexico, asking the assistance of Guatemala, and protesting against the former, it is evident that Guatemala would not have allowed so many years to pass by since these events, shrouding them with

a veil of authority and respect, but would long ago have made an effort to rescue and retain its territory, however unequal the struggle might have been in point of numbers and resources between Mexico and Central America, and still more so between Mexico and Guatemala—one of those minute nationalities that has sprung up in consequence of the shattering into fractions of the Central American Fatherland, which took place in sad days of mournful memory, and the reconstruction of which should be the ideal longed for with a burning desire by all those who feel within their breast the palpitations of true patriotism from a heart unfeignedly liberal; but that, relying on titles to which most powerful arguments can be opposed, with reiterated manifestations of all kinds on the part of Chiapas and Soconusco that they wish to appertain to Mexico, and do not wish, under any condition whatsoever, to form a part of Guatemala, as they only retain said recollections at the time of Spanish sway, and of the dismal years when the servile party ruled the country; a party through whose machination was brought about this separation, being one of so many evils they inflicted on the country, and that now, after more than sixty years have transpired since these events, Guatemala should arise and putting on military array, should go forth with the din of war, without resources and with numerically quite inferior forces, to conquer Chiapas and Soconusco, would be—forgive me the expression, gentlemen—a madness worthy of being ridiculed by the pen of Cervantes, were it not that such ridicule would be heaped on our native land—a country we ought to love with idolatry and veneration, and that such an act of folly would cause the shedding of rivers of blood of the people of Guatemala, to the sound of the wailings over a most cruel desolation. No people can be called too weak, no resources too limited, whenever a nation rises in defence of a truly national cause, its own preservation in a struggle for independence, and in order to resist an unwarranted aggression and defend its territory and institutions. In such a case nations are invincible, or will know how to fall with glory; they will allow themselves to be reduced to ruins and hetacombs rather than yield and be humiliated; and had such a case arisen, or should it ever arise, I feel convinced that all Guatemaltecans would rise like a man to fight with a will for their native land, to drench with their blood the fields of battle,

and rather perish with honor than see their flag disgraced or brought to scorn. And I for my part, gentlemen, solemnly declare that if such a day should come I would perish a thousand times at my post, which is the post of danger, in front of my soldiers and at the head of all my friends, before I would consent to a disgrace; that I would myself anticipate the calls of the enemy by destroying all those whose cowardice should lead them to refuse to sacrifice themselves in the struggle for their native land; and I would set fire to Guatemala with my own hand, fanning the flames with my breath, so as to leave no stone one upon another, before I consented to see it humiliated and conquered; and before its territory could be trampled on it would be necessary to pass over my body and the bodies of all my faithful companions. But in such solemn moments as these, when I must speak with all the frankness of my character, it is but due to acknowledge that a war for the acquisition of Chiapas and Soconusco was very far from being looked upon here as a national cause, as one of those popular wars that awake an echo, and inspire with enthusiasm the hearts of the multitude, a war in which the people at large, whose blood is ever the first to be poured out, would take an interest, one of those which are carried on and supported with vigor and unflinching determination. As Chiapas has never been in our possession since our Independence was obtained, and the actual generation there was born and has grown up under Mexican sway, little or no interest could be elicited in favor of its acquisition; geographers and historians, not only foreign, but native, figuring on the conservative side, did not speak of it as a part of our territory, hence there could hardly be a cause which would have provoked greater coolness, indifference, and unpopularity than the struggle undertaken to regain a province that that did not wish to belong to us, the reconquest of which would have conferred on us no advantage, and which this Republic never owned before. On the contrary, all the advantages were on the side of Mexico, which not only is our superior in population, in resources and in wealth, but against which we should have had to undertake a war of aggression, Mexico being on the defensive in a cause arousing the sympathies of its people, and thus being popular, the cause of Chiapas calling on Mexico for help, of Chiapas which, ever since the independence, has been

in the possession of Mexico, of Chiapas which in all its constitutions figures as an integral part of Mexican territory; and for this reason all governments there looking upon its cession, or even a consent to discuss the justice of possession, as an impossibility, as an attack on the Constitution, and as treason to the country. Chiapas has always shared the lot of Mexico, in the days of glory and prosperity as well as in the days of misfortune and calamity. Mexico could not abandon it, could not desert it, nor appear to doubt its own rights, and would have had to expend all its resources and power in the preservation and defense of Chiapas; any attempt to separate which, coming from any quarter, would have been considered an irreparable insult. Judge, then, if there would have been the remotest chance of gaining a success by force of arms. It should be here repeated, and I wish that the Assembly would bestow particular attention on this point, that Guatemala has never since its Independence held possession of the territory in dispute, nor ever had the slightest prospect or hope of possessing it, so that in reality, for the country the cession has been purely one in name; nothing has been ceded in fact, for a cession pre-supposes a clear and evident right and title to that which constitutes it, and pre-supposes also the real and undisturbed possession of a property.

A cession has been made of a thing the Republic never possessed, nor ever could hold; a thing which could not even conveniently be held; an illusory and ephemeral right has been surrendered, the right to dispute the ownership of Chiapas and Soconusco, a right not only Utopian, but even mischievous, inas-much as it created a state of restlessness among us, undermining confidence abroad, and breeding ill-will between two neighborly and fraternal countries; and all this without ever being able to produce any result favorable to Guatemala, only jeoparding that which it actually possessed, merely for the sake of the barren glory of keeping up the privilege of leaving open an unprofitable discussion about a thing it never had owned and never could become the owner of.

In order to form a correct judgment as to the justice of these ideas, it is necessary to bear in mind that the territory of Chiapas and Soconusco adjoins undisputed territory possessed

by Guatemala. If the land in question had been situate in the centre of Mexico, not adjoining territory possessed by Guatemala, it would have been of less importance to leave the question in abeyance, for although such a state of uncertainty would have produced other grave inconveniences, we should at least not have been exposed to the risk of losing the certain in the pursuit of the doubtful and impossible, nor of provoking conflicts that might have ended in ruin and disaster for Guatemala.

But the boundaries between this Republic and Mexico were never settled, for whenever they were treated of, the dispute about Chiapas and Soconusco sprang up; Mexico insisting that these should be considered as part of her territory, while Guatemala invariably denied this; hence it resulted that the boundaries remained forever undecided; that in consequence of this undetermined state of affairs the limits of Soconusco continually made greater inroads on the territory of Guatemala, and that districts and villages which, in 1821, and even in 1842, were recognized as indisputably belonging to Guatemala now are Mexican; that at every moment some new dispute and some new pretension arose, and that day by day the area rightly belonging to Guatemala come to be curtailed, an area which has been specially committed to the supervision of the Executive, whose duty it is to watch over it, preserve it in its integrity, and of which it must render the strictest account.

Every act which Guatemala might look upon as an encroachment would have given rise to explanations and claims, but these would not be taken into consideration, because it would be contended that the territories involved in the discussion belonged to Mexico, and in support of such affirmation appeal would always be made to the uncertainty of the boundaries, to the non-existence of a clear and decided line, and to the obscurity arising therefrom, entangling matters in a most intricate maze. And such claims and explanations would go on exciting feelings of resentment; they would breed animosity, would involve eventually the greatest difficulties and conflicts, whose bearings not those will best know how to measure and appreciate who lead a theoretical life in imaginary spheres, exposed like the ancient and learned King of Spain to lose his lands

while contemplating the movements of the stars of heaven, but those who daily experience the toil and are brought in contact with the practical difficulties of government, those upon whom all responsibility rests, and who in the hour of risk not only have to be the first to face the danger of any situation, but have also to answer for the property of the citizens, and the blood of soldiers, which would fall upon the heads of those who should rashly and inconsiderately provoke a struggle in support of a doubtful cause, in which no advantage could be gained, even should success attend it, and which would be hopeless in the end.

It mattered nothing to Mexico that the question should be prolonged to all eternity, in-as-much as that country was in time-honored and peaceful possession of the territory in dispute; Mexico did not run the risk of having its possession curtailed, but, on the contrary, there was the probability that it would continue to increase. Guatemala not only did not hold possession, but was exposed every day to new losses, hence it became a matter of vital importance to bring the dispute to a termination; it was urgent and not to be put aside, and it behooved us, therefore, to act, and work without rest with this object before us.

My mind has often been disquieted by these considerations, and I have been unable to listen with a smile of disdain to those who intrenched themselves behind the national honor in order to cry out against the idea of giving up Chiapas and Soconusco.

It was claimed that the national honor would not allow us to give up the right to a strip of land which had never been in our possession, but yet could consent to our contemplating with indifference the loss of that which we actually held, a loss which would continually increase, and which would have resulted from and as a natural consequence of the indeterminateness of the frontiers, and through the maintenance of an illusory, chimerical and ridiculous right!

They who thus invoked the dignity of Guatemala, who

in this manner are so jealous of its national honor, who make this boast of patriotic pride, should, instead of clamoring senselessly, have abandoned their homes and their families, take up arms, and march to the frontier, commencing in the first place by the conquest of all that which was in our positive possession, and has been lost only through persisting in asserting a claim that offered no advantage, and was impossible to justify.

But that false patriotism, fit only to give rise to difficulties, never does anything for the good of the country; it shirks all obligations, avoids all risks, abstains from all sacrifice, and creating an atmosphere of uneasiness, only hampers the action of those who can do good, of those who resolutely devote themselves to the study of and promotion of the welfare of the Republic, those finally who attaching more importance to practice and to deeds, than to words and formulas, consult conscientiously the true interests of the nation.

Since then this barren question had to be abandoned. It was a thousand times better to at least avoid a pecuniary indemnity. It should never be said that our silence had been bought with money, nor that we had made an unworthy cession in exchange for a handful of gold. If not right or honorable to yield in the dispute, it certainly could not be made so by receiving in compensation any amount whatsoever, and if it was sound policy, prudent, and necessary to the interests of Guatemala to put an end to the discussion, burying forever in oblivion the pretensions we had hitherto advanced, it had to be done in a manner entirely decorous, without anything that could be looked on as a sale of territory, without anything that with a semblance of truth might give rise to the senseless suspicion, that they who bore part in the negotiation had stained their hands by contact with coin, and finally without anything that could detract from the merit of Guatemala, and could make it appear as a salable commodity.

The Republic, and the government in its name, have withdrawn from the dispute, because it behooved them to withdraw; no sale was made, for none could rightly be made; for, if to maintain the right to Chiapas and Soconusco, had been

really one of those questions of honor and dignity in which any compromise is impossible, that honor and dignity would not have been preserved by any payment, but it would rather have been still more tarnished and degraded, and whether with or without indemnity never should we have yielded.

I take no notice of, nor am I intimidated or in the least influenced by what the systematic enemies of my administration may say. They disapprove of my conduct, and by the use of miserable intrigues have placed difficulties in my way, in order that I might not be able to attain the solution I fortunately have reached; they will cry out that my conduct is dishonorable and wanting in patriotism. Their criticisms, instead of disconcerting me, cause me the most lively satisfaction. If the step I have taken had been damaging to the interests of Guatemala, if it had been dishonorable for the Government and for myself, they would have endeavored to assist me, they would have applauded me, and would have caused the greatest praises to be showered upon me. They disapprove and vituperate because they are aware that this step inaugurates an era of peace and tranquility for Guatemala, because they are aware that it creates for me a claim to the gratitude and esteem of my fellow-citizens, and that, thanks to it, our history may some day inscribe my name in the book in which are inscribed the names of those who have served their country well. Let enemies, then, censure and find fault with me; it neither takes me by surprise, nor do I deplore it; on the contrary, I wished for it, and am glad of it. It was but natural that they should disapprove of my conduct if it does away with the mad intrigues they were concocting by taking advantage of the coolness of our relations with Mexico, which resulted from the wretched boundary dispute. Their rage is easily explained, for, under cover of this dispute, and using it as a pretext, they were sowing alarm and uneasiness in the Republic, spreading false rumors of rupture and of war, disquieting commerce, causing industry to flag, placing difficulties in the way of and rendering almost impossible all business, and destroying credit and confidence. No wonder they disapprove of acts that put an end to a question, which they made use of because they saw in it an obstacle to the Government's devoting its direct and exclusive

attention to the progress and rise of the country. It was to be expected that I should receive blame at their hands, for, from the moment it became known that the difference was settled, all doubts and fears have disappeared, credit has been re-established, enterprise revives, capital has come forward, abandoning the obscurity of the recesses where in the days of alarm it had timidly hidden, in order to impart a new life and animation to undertakings; in fact great improvements are in preparation for our country, thanks to the peace and tranquility which has been established. Welcome, then, to their slanders! Their disapproval is one of my best titles of honor, and one of the evidences that prove most clearly the opportuneness and necessity of the measure I adopted, and it justifies my acts.

But though I do not fear the unjust and ill-intentioned censures of my enemies, I do fear and hold in respect the censure and reprobation of my friends, of those men, of those friends who, like myself, have taken upon their shoulders the great work of the regeneration and improvement of the country.

And my friends might justly have blamed me, and would have had cause for blaming me and cursing me, if I had put in jeopardy the future and the destinies of the country, in a foolish enterprise, and an unwarrantable war. They would have had cause to curse me, if through a mistaken sentiment of childish self-love and a false sense of dignity, I had clung to a fantastic right, and thus brought upon the country real evils and positive ruin; if with the mad project of conquering what we had never possessed, nor could possess, and which finally it would not even have been in our interest to possess, I had plunged the country into all the horrors of a struggle in which all the advantages would have been against us. They, my friends, would be justified in calling me to account for their ruined fortunes, their properties destroyed; they would call me to account for the priceless blood of the sons of the country uselessly shed; they would call me to account to the widows and orphans of an innumerable number of victims, and for the desolation and mourning of the people, and then with right the avenging image of our native land would rise above the ruins to execrate my name and to curse my memory, if following the

dictates of a foolish misconception, I had plunged it into an abyss of disgrace whilst invoking its honor,—I had sacrificed the lives and fortunes of its sons, watering its soil with wasted blood, and nipping the first symptoms of wellbeing, that were beginning to spring forth in luxuriance from the seeds of liberal ideas. Now I have the satisfaction to feel that I am very far from being censured by my friends; I have had to make sacrifice, but this sacrifice meets with ample compensation in their good opinion and esteem, and the good accruing from it to the country I adore and to which I am thoroughly devoted.

I have just said that in order to solve this question I had to make a sacrifice, and I must now add that it has been the greatest sacrifice of my life, and that to make up my mind to it, I had to use over myself an extraordinary amount of command and of resolute self-denial. No, after meditating on the subject and putting aside all prepossession and prejudice, I could not have the slightest doubt as to the necessity and expediency of the measure I adopted, but yet there crowded on my mind all the difficulties it might occasion me, all the versions that might be put forward, and all the wretched detractions that would be sure to follow me. Our politicians had asserted that the right of Guatemala to Chiapas and Soconusco was irrefutable; that this right ought to be vindicated; that national pride demanded that no concession should be made on the subject, and that this right should never be given up, nor the title arising therefrom. And this opinion was filtrating and spreading amongst the men of the country, who already, without examination, entertained it and communicated it from one to another. A great majority, without being familiar with the dispute, without studying its antecedents, without taking into account all the circumstances connected with it, without a clear appreciation of the matter, without taking the trouble to examine it from its origin, and to master all its details, endorsed such opinion, and in this manner a sort of tradition was being formed, echoed by every one who busied himself about it; a tradition from which even my administration has not been exempt. With this antecedent before him, any one who should speak of maintaining the rights of Guatemala to a territory unknown to nearly all, and the history of which

was completely foreign to him, would flatter public vanity by appearing to sustain the honor of the nation; while any one who, on the contrary, looking at the dispute from its true aspect, should seek to put an end to it, giving up all discussion about the ownership of Chiapas and Soconusco, would expose himself to calumny, to the accusation of want of patriotism, and why should I conceal it? Be accused, perhaps, of weakness or of treason. While, therefore, on the other hand, a conscientious appreciation of the real interests of the country was well calculated to counsel the abandonment of this useless dispute, and thereby securing the boundaries, as well as the tranquility and the prosperity of Guatemala, there would, on the other, be raised, to stifle any action to that effect, the voice of personal convenience and self-interest, and whosoever undertook to present the matter in its true light, and patriotically dare to carry out such a bold and decisive measure, would expose himself to the grave danger of losing his popularity.

I have done, Gentlemen, what hitherto no Government had the resolution to do; I have withdrawn from a contest from which neither Paron, nor Luis Batres, nor Aycinena before me have dared to withdraw. I shall not allow myself to be compared with any of the leaders of the servile party, who brought so many misfortunes upon the country, who with their blunders and their ill-deeds provoked the separation of Chiapas, and who, by joining the Mexican empire, sanctioned such separation, thereby making patent their own abasement and failing sense of dignity. The servile party in 1854, in the conferences that preceded the projected treaty with Don Juan N. de Pereda, had already recognized the incorporation of Chiapas and Soconusco; if that treaty was not concluded, if the dispute was not brought to an end, if the solution that I have now arrived at was not reached then, if there was introduced, so as to set it on one side, the claim for the payment of the debts of Chiapas, as the necessary condition for the abandonment of the rights of Guatemala, with the clear intention that the other stipulations should not be accepted, it was not in compliance with a feeling of national delicacy, nor because this conduct arose from a generous impulse not to curtail the territory, nor to wound the pride and self-respect of Guatemala. It was as though that

party, being condemned to cause only misfortunes without having the courage to repair them, and to be unable to render any service to the country, or to do anything that should deserve imperishable gratitude, the Government had become apprehensive that by such a measure its unpopularity would reach its climax, and the measure of public indignation would pass all bounds.

I have not shrunk from facing these dangers, however great the struggle within me may have been. Often has the consciousness of my duty battled within me with the fear that the people might misinterpret and not sanction my proceedings, that it might withdraw from me, not power, for which I have no ambition, and from which I have so often wished to retire, but its esteem and confidence, and might look upon me, though only for a moment, as disloyal to the interests of the country. I thought for one thing that the baseness of my enemies might go so far as to cry out that I had been bought by Mexican gold, and that I was capable of lowering myself to their level of venality and for money sell the soil, thereby depriving Guatemala of a real and positive right. I reflected that they might tax me with weakness, imagining as they have already imagined a thousand absurd plans about selling the territory to the government of the United States; that there was on my side a weak yielding, or that my resolution was the impulse of the moment, due to imaginary refusals and fancied obstacles. I came to reflect that this step more than any other might be made use of by malevolence and calumny, to spread inauspicious interpretations and senseless conjectures that would represent me as untrue to the cause or the Republic, and as trampling under-foot the rights of the people. I thought that perhaps an unjust opinion might declare itself against me, tarnishing my name for having done what I consider the most precious service ever rendered to my country; and I thought that this dishonor might fall on the innocent heads of my children, sharers of my heart, and the delight of my life, to whom I do not aspire to bequeath either riches or power, but the precious heritage of a spotless name and the gratitude of the country, earned by the conduct of their father, ever patriotic and loyal. And I wish that they may always be able to lift up their heads with the pride of in-

nocence, that no one may be able to point at them on account of any infamous action of their father; that on looking over my history they may always find it worthy of respect and consistent, so that they may respect my name and bless my memory as that of a faithful servant of Guatemala, and that they may be able to take pride in being the sons of one who was a good son of his country! I did what neither Paron, nor Batres, nor Aycinena did, because I believed that I ought to do it, and because, having before my eyes the idea of duty, I always act as I believe I should act, without paying attention to what others did or left undone.

I do not propose to clear myself from the charge that may arise, insinuating that I may have been bought, for there are imputations so infamous that one fears contact with their infamy while taking notice of them for a moment, were it but to trample them in the dust, for, like the viper, they sting the foot that crushes them. To those who may accuse me of weakness and may believe that I was prompted while in the United States by some unforeseen incidents, I will answer with the testimony of innumerable political and personal friends, some of whom even belonged to the previous administration, who are all of them fully aware of the resolve that I arrived at for some time past, and who know that when I asked for special authority at the hands of the Assembly, it was with the firm intention of giving up Chiapas and Soconusco, and they will confirm that I have debated the subject with them at length, adducing in support of my resolution the same ideas, and the same arguments I now have the honor of submitting to the Assembly. I may furthermore reply to them that in official notes from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, directed to the then Minister of Guatemala in Washington, prior to my departure from this country and by my instructions, it was stated that in conformity with what was expressed in other dispatches, Guatemala had always been, and still was most sincerely desirous that an end should be put to the dispute pending about the boundary of its territory with that of the United States of Mexico; and if it could be solved by arbitration, the earnest and long-entertained wishes of the Government would be realized. It was there also stated that the Government did not feel the least uneasiness as

to the conditions that might attach to the verdict to be given by the umpire, for even though the same might move adverse, there would at any rate have been obtained the great boon that, while doing away with any accusations founded or not, for the future the boundaries of the two countries would be clearly defined, the continual difficulties to which their uncertainty gave rise removed, and with it the constant encroachments would be stopped that were taking place all the time upon that portion of which Guatemala had held uninterrupted possession. By this note which had been published improperly, since it was directed to the Legation by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and ought not to have seen the light without special orders and instructions, it was clearly set forth what the leanings and intentions of the government were, and it was made patent that its conduct was consistent, and that what was stated publicly was in perfect accord and harmony with these confidential documents, intended to remain in the archives of the Legation, where they were entrusted to the safe keeping of the Minister.

The charge of weakness on account of the arrangement entered into is the most unjust charge that can be brought against me, for, putting aside a modesty which in these circumstances would be impolitic and unbecoming, I must state that few would have had the courage to take the step I have just taken. I have compared many times the sensations that one feels on the day of battle when going into action, and the impressions that I experienced in going through all that I had to go through, so as to arrive at the determination to sign this convention, which, though so useful and indispensable for Guatemala, might turn out for me a source of mortification and disappointment, and I had to muster more energy and resolution in order to do so than I should have needed to take my part in a battle amidst the deadly bullets of the enemy. There is in battle a certain enthusiasm, a certain feverish excitement that stimulates and leads one on, reducing all danger to insignificant proportions; there is the prospect of fame for him who fights with valor; the allurement of triumph, the flattering hope of the honors and splendor of victory; and even the idea of falling under the fire of the enemy and perishing on the field of battle, presents itself to the imagination as surrounded by a

glorious wealth of immortality; one dies with honor and conquers the right to live in the memory of posterity, with the renown which courage and heroism always confer. But to sign in cold blood a convention which, however productive of good to the country, may bring upon him who, following the dictates of his conscience, determines to conclude it, calumnies of all kinds, antipathy and public reprobation, and perhaps even the stigma of disloyalty, of ingratitude, and of treason; to him who undertakes to do so, none of these attractions are held out—his hand trembles, his heart itself may fail for a moment, and if at last the step is taken, it is after suffering the effects of a violent struggle of the strongest and most opposite feelings.

In this struggle, Gentlemen, the strength of my feeling of duty triumphed finally over my wish for tranquility and personal comfort. To serve my country I had sacrificed my health and repose, I did not shrink from a temporary separation from my family, and I had without the slightest hesitation exposed myself to the accidents of travel. To serve my country I have also done that which it remained for me to do, the only thing I had not done hitherto; I have risked my honor and my name, which I value all the more because they are the honor and the name of my children, the priceless treasure that they must receive from me, and preserve with the greatest veneration; and I have risked the prestige and popularity with which this generous nation, whose happiness and progress are and always have been the object of my most ardent aspirations, has constantly honored me.

And I have not regretted for one single moment, nor do I now regret what I did, but on the contrary I am proud of it, and take credit to myself. I have the consciousness that I have complied with my duty; that I have rendered a service to my country, and on learning the enthusiasm with which the news was received here of the convention agreed upon, and on seeing the demonstrations with which this people, whom I so dearly love, received me on my return from carrying out the mission I had undertaken, as though it wished to testify that it did full justice to my loyalty, and acknowledged the propriety of my actions, I was deeply moved, and the sacrifice I had

made appeared to me insignificant—I felt within me new strength to repeat it a thousand times, were it necessary, and to make for the people still greater ones, if required, in return for its affection and faithfulness.

The dispute, which for such a long time has been a cause of uneasiness to the people of Guatemala, has at length been settled; the treaty defining the boundaries such as laid down on the 12th of August, stipulated that it should be concluded in Mexico, and it has since been signed; there has been marked out in it, with perfect accord, and without any necessity for arbitration, the line of division, and with a constant view to the greatest clearness and security in the boundaries, we have succeeded in mutually establishing just compensations. It is now to be submitted to your examination and judgment. We shall henceforward have a safe, permanent and well determined line; two peoples of America—two contiguous and fraternal nations are thus saved the danger of enmity, arising from a mere frontier question, and the risk of staining their soil with blood in a fratricidal struggle for a strip of land of comparatively little importance to either of them.

When the time comes for me to deliver up the Presidency, I shall be able to leave it in tranquility; I shall not return Chiapas and Soconusco to the nation, for I did not receive them when I came into power; what I did receive and shall not return is the wretched legacy of the boundary dispute with Mexico, a source of uneasiness and disturbance to the country. If my not returning such a legacy of calamity be a reproach, I shall bear the burden of it cheerfully.

Gentlemen, on submitting to you all the documents in which the treaty entered into is set forth, allow me to entreat you to examine them calmly, and to let the most entire liberty preside over your deliberations, without partiality or considerations of any kind. Do not be swayed by a wish to be agreeable to me, for I may have been subject to an error of judgment and may be swept away at any moment. Be solely guided by the wish to serve your country disinterestedly and courageously, for it may at any time demand of yourselves or of your sons an account of the resolution that you may arrive at.

There is committed to your decision the most important business ever submitted to the Assembly. If, in representation of the country, with your hands placed upon your hearts, you in your consciences approve my conduct, I shall feel an indescribable satisfaction; but before doing so reflect that you will share with me all responsibility inseparable from it,—that you will identify yourselves with me before the tribunals of public opinion and of history, which will judge this question in the future, and inscribe therein either glorious lines of praise, or lines of disgrace and of shame for all who shall have shared in the transaction. There is time yet for reflection. Act with firmness and loyalty, without considerations that later on could only be alleged to cover you with reproach.

If, unfortunately, the step I have taken does not merit your approval,—if you consider that it injures or dishonors the country,—in my own name and in the name of Guatemala, I entreat you to condemn it energetically and freely, so as not to bear consequences it may entail and not to compromise your reputations, through an act of foolish compliance or pusillanimous weakness, and not to allow the country to be dragged into a thing involving shame or indignity which would bring on you eternal self-reproach, and a tremendous responsibility.

If your votes are opposed to the negotiation, I will take refuge in the rectitude of my conscience; I shall raise my forehead without a blush, for my only motive has been the welfare of Guatemala; I shall be free from all reproach, for I have done all that was in my power to avert the evils that may befall us through leaving this dispute unsettled, and am resigned to submit calmly the share I bore in this matter to the impartial judgment of posterity and to the verdict of history.

J. RUFINO BARRIOS.

GUATEMALA, 1st December, 1882.